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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001202

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/SPG, AF/SE WILLIAMSON, NSC FOR BPITTMAN AND
HUDSON

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: EASTERN SUDAN LEADER WARNS OF "HIDDEN FAMINE"

REF: A. KHARTOUM 446

[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 701

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On August 7, the State Minister of Transportation, Mubarak Mabrouk Salem, and former Eastern Front leader of the "Rashaida Free Lions" rebel group, told CDA Fernandez that a famine is developing in Eastern Sudan. He stated that GoS officials have ignored or even covered up this looming crisis. Salem also discussed the ICC, Eastern Front relations with the U.S. and SPLM, and his desire to visit the U.S. END SUMMARY.

A HIDDEN FAMINE IN THE EAST?

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[1](#)2. (C) After thanking CDA Fernandez for visiting the region and shedding light on the problems of Eastern Sudan, Salem stated that there is a growing food crisis in his home region. Salem said there has been a terrible drought in the last year. He added that this, along with high transportation costs and an increased number of refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea (also experiencing drought), has led to a severe shortage of food. Salem noted this famine is uniform among all three eastern states. Salem added that senior GoS officials are ignoring this problem and, in some cases, even trying to cover it up. He said that he has been publicly very critical of these officials, and that he recently spoke to the media about this growing crisis. He fears that "what begins in the East" will spread to other parts of Sudan and compared the regime's silence to former dictator Nimeiri covering the famine in Western Sudan in 83-84.

[1](#)3. (C) Salem stated that Saudi Arabia has already recognized this food shortage and made a significant donation to the International Organization of East Sudan ("As-Shuruq"). Salem said that this organization could cooperate with USAID to ensure a timely and efficient distribution. (Note: Salem stated that his notetaker was the "Head of Implementation" for this organization, and it is likely that Salem has very strong ties to this institution. End Note.) Salem said that even ICC indictee and Minister of State for Humanitarian Affairs Ahmed Haroun has recognized the gravity of this food shortage by releasing food stocks to feed 3,500 former fighters from the Rashaida Free Lions.

STANDING WITH BASHIR ON ICC ...

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[1](#)4. (C) Salem, who had recently threatened to resign because of corruption in the ministry and the National Customs office, described the possibility of a formal ICC indictment for President Bashir as a "real threat." Specifically instructing the CDA's notetaker to "write this down," Salem stated that "I am against turning anyone over (to the ICC,)

but I am with the British, French, and U.S. in trying to find a political solution to this problem. Whatever you want to solve this, short of handing anyone over, we should do in Darfur." Salem said that he had grown tired of the Chinese exploitation of his country's resources, and that he looks forward to the day when the U.S. and the West can play a larger economic role in the country. He noted that there are shared interests between the U.S. and the Sudan that should provide the basis for a renewed relationship.

... BUT STILL CRITICAL OF THE NCP

15. (C) Although standing with Bashir on the ICC, Salem said that he continues his coordination with other opposition movements. Salem stated that he is one of the more outspoken critics of the NCP among opposition political parties. He stated that the regime has destroyed the social fabric of Darfur, that the NCP are liars and hypocrites responsible for the mess Sudan is in and that the GoS security apparatus answers to no one, and that there is a need for the return of tribal and traditional leadership to Darfur. Salem was equally critical of the SPLM, saying that it has not been an effective ally, as "the whole of the south is just looking forward to secession." Salem added that Sudan is suffering from a fixation on secession, and that other movements in Darfur and the East will also want to secede if the South becomes an independent country. He noted that his own minister, who is SPLM, is extremely corrupt.

16. (C) Salem said that he will attempt to draft a framework for finding a solution to Darfur's problems. He said that Darfur needs a "high committee" representing the region's

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political, civil society, and rebel leadership. Salem stated that he has visited Darfur several times and that he hopes to play a positive role in the future. Salem noted that he would also like to visit Washington to "shed light on the problems of Eastern Sudan." CDA responded that initiatives to solve Darfur and mitigate the effects of the ICC are mushrooming in Sudan. While he could not say how the ICC would treat the issue of an actual ICC arrest warrant of President Bashir, "no one believes the NCP" and talking rather than doing - on Darfur - is not going to accomplish anything. There is not a lot of time for Sudan to do what is right on Darfur and mentioned the constant NCP game on UNAMID deployment over the past year, the political and economic demands of IDPs (such as compensation and land issues) that need to be fulfilled, and the need for a "basic change in the way the NCP acts with others - both inside Sudan and with the international community."

COMMENT

17. (C) USAID partners working in the east, primarily in Red Sea and Kassala States, have warned about the potential drought looming this year, but are not yet characterizing the situation as 'famine' conditions at this point. Recent discussion with FAO in Kassala indicates that the next two weeks of the planting season are critical for the success of the next harvest; if rains do not come in sufficient quantity and duration, there is likely to be a significant impact on yields. Certainly food prices in Sudan are skyrocketing. Post will be watching the situation closely and will update on the situation in the coming weeks. Salem's desire to help find a solution to Darfur is genuine, but he now represents one of many different actors which, without coordination, may find themselves stumbling over one another in the push to find an immediate fix to Darfur's problems. Although Sudan's constant crises often overtake Eastern Sudan issues, Salem is right that Eastern Sudan deserves more attention and a visit to Washington by Salem and his Eastern Front colleagues could help raise awareness of this crucial and fragile region, which in comparison to Darfur and many parts of the South is much more impoverished. It would also underscore our views that all of Sudan's marginalized people - Southerners,

Darfuris and Easterners - should work together for the common
good. END COMMENT.
FERNANDEZ